

STAND UP FOR VATICAN II

“Stand up for Vatican II is a campaign designed to involve the whole church, Catholic organisations and individuals, who recognise the benefits the second Vatican Council brought to the church, to stand together to celebrate the forty fifth anniversary of the closure of the council”.

A meeting to launch the campaign was held on the 26th January 2010 at the Thistle Hotel in central London. An audience of about 200 was welcomed by the chair for the evening, Frank Regan, editor of the review ‘Renew’. We are here to celebrate the spirit of Vatican II with its focus on our evangelising presence in the world, to celebrate its fruits in areas such as lay participation and Justice and Peace, to reflect on our growth, both personally and in our experience of being church. Tensions and reticence were an inevitable outcome in the ensuing years and we have to look to the future of our church. We were to hear three speakers: Robert Nowell, an assistant editor of the Tablet who reported on the council, Myra Poole, educator, historian and feminist theologian, and Michael Winter, a theologian and founder member of the Movement for a Married Clergy. They would speak for only 18 to 20 minutes. Their task was to stimulate us to exercise our memories, our thinking and our preoccupations about a church ‘semper reformanda’, and then to speak out at the meeting. Noting that there were not too many young people here, we have to ask ‘What do we hand on?’

Derek Reeve, a priest and one of the initiators of the campaign, was invited to set the tone for the meeting. The tone he sounded was positive. We are here to follow Jesus in the community of the church. We are not here to criticise or complain but to react in a positive way. He expressed his appreciation of those theologians who prepared the way for Vatican II and of Pope John, who called a council to represent the changeless message of Jesus in a new way. We have to make that vision real, that of a renewed church, the people of God, a sacrament of the coming reign of God’s love. The vision has, however, dimmed and we are here because we want that vision. It is up to us to make that vision a reality. He asked for a few moments of silence to open our hearts in love.

Robert Nowel

History, said Robert Nowell, is full of ‘What Ifs?’ What if Vatican I had not come to an abrupt end with the arrival of Victor Emmanuel’s troops. The debates had only got as far as the papacy. Vatican II did carry on but the idea was implanted that the church could continue onwards on the basis of a head. That attitude persisted into Vatican II where Vatican officials wanted the bishops to rubber stamp their arrangements. The bishops’ ‘No’ redressed the balance. The stress was that the bishops operated in communion with the Pope – he is chairman, not dictator. However, there were topics they were not allowed to discuss e.g. birth control, celibacy and how bishops are appointed. Nowell referred to Rosmini’s Five Wounds of the Church – a work that was put on the Index. Bishops were elected by the clergy and the people of the diocese before confirmation by Rome. Now there is less and less sounding of local opinion. He referred to his own article “How not to appoint a bishop” which regarded the present state of affairs as an example of ‘Do not disturb the nice bureaucratic way of running things’. He instanced signs of the crisis. *Humanae Vitae* ignored collegiality – The bishops looked only for loopholes. The Bishops’ Conference in Indonesia asked to ordain married men as in the Eastern Church because of their shortage of priests – the answer was ‘No’. The newly introduced third rite of penance was pastorally effective and, indeed led to an increase in individual confessions - Rome clamped down. Our bishops suggested that we start the Millenium celebrations with a general rite of penance – The answer was ‘No’. A Dutch pastoral council, in their characteristically outspoken way, discussed the uncoupling of priesthood and celibacy and the ordination of women – no progress.

The fundamental problem is the centralisation of the appointment of bishops (Note how long Northampton diocese was without a bishop when Rome's Opus Dei candidate was rejected as unacceptable.), coupled with the constant surveillance made possible by modern technology. The answer to the problem is difficult since this is a major structural problem. Vatican II got the theory right but there has been no devolution and no listening – note the present attempt to impose a Latinised liturgy. We must pray and continue on our way, as the attention we pay to the leaders of our church diminishes.

Michael Winter

Michael Winter began with the story of the lone Catholic on a Scottish island who could get to church only after a long and often dangerous boat ride. When he confessed that it was twelve years since his last confession and the priest demurred, his reply was that if he was in mortal sin it was too dangerous – if not it was not worth the risk. Michael then posed a serious question: 'What happened on April 22nd. 1418?' It was the Council of Constance, which ended the great schism and which laid down that there should be a general council every ten years to supervise the Pope and curia. Nothing happened and we have the same problem, much like that of shareholders in a company, namely, 'How do we control bureaucracy?' The parable of the broken wine skins is relevant and we have all seen the casualties. Yves Congar in Vraie Fausse Reforme dans L'Eglise laid down four conditions for reform which were fulfilled by Vatican II : i. Must be motivated by charity ii. Must involve a return to the sources iii. Must show 'Patientia' i.e. it involves a working out over time iv. Must not threaten the unity of the church. Reform can be doctrinal, moral or institutional. Vatican II, though showing success in such as liturgical reform, ignored institutional reform. It did, however, lay a basis for such in exploring the nature of the church and setting out the role of clergy and hierarchy as one of 'diakonia' or service. The clergy exists for the sake of the laity and not the other way around. One can envisage a church without clergy, but not a church without laity.

The root cause of the problem was that, in imitating the rule of empires, the papacy became an absolute monarchy. All power was in the hands of one man and there was no accountability, but rather a great deal of secrecy. Pius XI laid down the principle of subsidiarity – good decision making is made at the lowest possible level. This has been disregarded e.g. Rome had to decide that it was possible for little girls to become altar servers. The bishops cannot decide anything. The casualties are both bishops and laity. Likewise, following Trent and the 1983 code, there is no defense against a dictatorial parish priest.

What are the remedies?

- i. Elected pastoral councils at diocesan and parish level. Only four dioceses have them.
- ii. As our ancestors knew – parishes must be recast as real communities i.e. no more than seventy people. In Saxon days there were forty parishes in Canterbury. King street in Norwich has eight churches. Such groupings could meet for larger liturgies on special occasions. The obvious demand for an increased number of priests is no problem.
- iii. What are the agencies for such reform? We can hope for an enlightened Pope but we cannot be isolated from the processes of society such as non violent protest. The resignation of 100,000 priests is an example of such protest. Free speech and criticism must be exercised – note the influence of Jack Dominian on marriage teaching. When in the diocese of Linz in Austria 23 deaneries protested publicly the candidate for the seat of bishop resigned. Petition for the need to experiment before imposing the new missal has already 10,000 signatories.
- iv. Recognize that we are at a critical juncture because of scandals and cover-ups.

- v. Recognize that constructive and courteous criticism is the mark of a mature society cf. the remarks on 'conscience' made by Joseph Ratzinger in 1968.

Myra Poole

Speaking of the church in the spirit of Vatican II Myra began with Vatican III and where it should be held. The Holy Spirit rejected Dublin because of the difficulty of the accent and New York as too expensive. He/she warmed to the suggestion of Rome as venue as he/she had not been there for a long time. Her presentation which followed was very much a very serious and personal story which she shared. In 2001 she was hauled up in a very cavalier fashion because of her work for a 'Congress on women's ordination'. A participating member of the World Council of Churches had to withdraw because of pressure from Rome. What was strengthened in her as a result was the need to follow one's own conscience and not to be frightened of the church.

The rough ride experienced by women in the church has conscientised them as regards their own situation. An additional problem is the lack of education in parishes – they know nothing. How different from the excitement of Vatican II! There were wonderful women at the council but only 23 of them and they had many problems. Only one of the women was married and she was present because her husband, who had been invited, refused to attend without her. Some bishops welcomed women but others were misogynist. The Saint Joan's Alliance asked for women deacons and women priests yet women were not allowed to speak at the council.

Gaudium and Spes, in Myra's opinion, was the most important document. As one Canadian Bishop put it: 'It was the only document not born in the general sin of clericalism'. It brought in a new form of theology based on discerned experience. Yet there are only 14 mentions of women in all the documents and nothing was kept about women in the Vatican archives.

Myra referred to John xxiii and Paul vi (before he became fearful) –What a good Pope could do! Yet Humanae Vitae undid a communitarian church. A reference to 23 years of peaceful protest on the steps of Westminster Cathedral led to the main point of this personal presentation: 'There can be no whole church unless we have an equal church'.

Following on the chair asked for brief interventions now that our memory and our concerns have been jogged. The focus has to be on what has to be done. I can highlight only some of the many fascinating points made with great passion till the meeting came to a close:

- i. The first speaker spoke of the disillusioned who desired to return.
- ii. Another spoke of a certain despair but how his eyes had been opened by reading Acts, quoting Joel, about the Spirit being poured out in vision and prophecy on all, men and women.
- iii. We can begin to build on small things. The document The Sign We Give can take us a long way.
- iv. The present church is not a democracy. The only way forward is to encourage our bishops to give up 'obsequious diplomacy', to take courage and complain to the one who is only 'primus inter pares'.
- v. Influence of small conversations and encouraging each other.
- vi. Grass roots experience important. The living community of worship and witness among the gay and lesbian community in Soho is such. Encourage the bishops to be honest and speak the truth.

- vii. We need a sign of humility from the church e.g. Twelve Step type groups in parishes against abuse.
- viii. To be practical about the future focus on short term ends (e.g. The transliteration missal) and use mass movements such as facebook and twitter. The bishops have abandoned their pastoral role and good intentions are not enough.
- ix. Do not be inward looking but link to mission of church and state of world.
- x. Learn from history – the church was democratic in the past. Spread that information – get blogging (Benedict has encouraged it). Use technology to fight the Vatican.
- xi. Challenge structures and authority. Build anew within the shell of the old. Support the many small groups living out Vatican II.
- xii. Organise local groups like this national meeting. After all there are not many priests and bishops here.
- xiii. We are church – get on with it and less about what ‘they’ ought to do. What about organizing a lay national pastoral congress!
- xiv. Use the word ‘Church’ carefully. We are all responsible.
- xv. The Pope is coming in September. Plan how to get his attention. Our relationship is with God, not with him.
- xvi. Not many young people here. They are not as thrilled as we were – push for more formation for lay people in church.
- xvii. The bishops are in Rome for an ad limina visit – Email them with your concerns.

Bernard Wynne, another initiator of the campaign concluded with a few remarks.

1. Where do we go from here? This is a campaign and we are not an organization. Go to the web site (www.standup4vatican2.org.uk) and sign the petition asking the bishops to get back to the 1995 position The Sign we Give. They accepted it then.
2. How do we involve the young? Create a lot of noise and encourage our bishops to return to what Vatican II meant. Get inside your organisations, put it on your Parish web site. Share addresses and organise in diocesan groups for similar meetings.
3. Ask bishops to celebrate Mass for 45th anniversary of Vatican II.
4. Remember, success depends on you.

Joe Mulrooney